

## **13.0 COMMENTS AND COORDINATION**

This chapter describes the process used to involve governmental agencies and the public in the preparation of the DEIS for the I-94/TH 10 Interregional Connection.

Public and agency involvement for this project has been on-going since the 1996 Study and the EIS scoping process, including public meetings with local governments and other interested parties, input from the project Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and River Corridor Advisory Committee (RCAC) and a scoping public hearing.

Public and agency involvement also played an important part in the preparation of this DEIS. Local governments, agencies and the general public continued to be informed and have had an opportunity to comment on the proposed project throughout the DEIS preparation process through advisory committees, media coverage and open house and other public meetings.

### **13.1 AGENCY/LOCAL GOVERNMENT COORDINATION**

Agency/local government coordination included advisory committees, cooperative agencies, small group meetings and industrial coordination meetings as needed to discuss/resolve issues as they were identified.

FHWA and Mn/DOT are the joint lead agencies for this project. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE), the MnDNR and the St. Cloud Area Planning Organization (APO) participated as cooperating agencies in review of draft environmental documents and as participants in the project Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) throughout the scoping and EIS processes. The COE is a cooperating agency for the EIS pursuant to the Council on Environmental Quality's regulations for implementing NEPA (40 CFR, Part 1501.6), and Corps of Engineers permit authority under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (33 CFR 320-330). The St. Cloud APO and MnDNR are cooperating agencies providing input and expertise, consistent with NEPA regulations, related to their roles as metropolitan planning organization (MPO) for transportation-related issues in the St. Cloud planning area [St. Cloud APO] and management/regulatory authority over various natural resources (Mississippi Scenic Riverway, fisheries, wildlife, etc.) in this study area [MnDNR].

A River Corridor Advisory Committee (RCAC) was also established as part of the DEIS process (see Sections 13.1.1 and 13.1.2 for further information). The TAC and RCAC included representatives from federal, state, regional and local agencies/governments. The DEIS process also included coordination with several additional natural and cultural resource agencies (see Sections 13.1.3 and 13.1.4 for more information). Other agencies were contacted as well during preparation of the DEIS. When requested, Mn/DOT project representatives also attended meetings of local governments, economic development organizations, etc., to discuss the project and get input from local representatives. A complete list of all agencies involved in the preparation of the DEIS is provided in Table 13.1 (see descriptions in Section 13.2). Copies of the DEIS will be provided to reviewing agencies, local libraries, city/town halls and to other interested organizations. A preliminary list of recipients of the document is provided in Table 13.2.

**TABLE 13.1**  
**INVOLVED AGENCIES**

<p><b>Lead Agencies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)</li> <li>Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT)</li> </ul> <p><b>Cooperating Agencies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE)</li> <li>Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MnDNR)</li> <li>St. Cloud Area Planning Organization (APO)</li> </ul>
<p><b>TAC</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>FHWA</li> <li>U.S. Army COE</li> <li>Mn/DOT</li> <li>MnDNR</li> <li>Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA)</li> <li>Minnesota Department of Health (MDH)</li> <li>Stearns County</li> <li>Sherburne County</li> <li>Wright County</li> <li>St. Cloud APO</li> <li>City of Becker</li> <li>City of Clearwater</li> <li>City of St. Cloud</li> </ul>
<p><b>RCAC</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mn/DOT</li> <li>City of St. Augusta</li> <li>City of Becker</li> <li>City of Clear Lake</li> <li>City of Clearwater</li> <li>City of St. Cloud</li> <li>St. Cloud APO</li> <li>Sherburne County</li> <li>Stearns County</li> <li>Wright County</li> <li>Becker Township</li> <li>Clear Lake Township</li> <li>Haven Township</li> <li>Lynden Township</li> <li>Silver Creek Township</li> </ul>
<p><b>Other Agencies Consulted</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>U.S. Department of the Interior - Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)</li> <li>Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)</li> <li>U.S. Department of Agriculture – Natural Resource Conservation Offices in Stearns, Sherburne and Wright Counties</li> <li>Clearwater Area Economic Development</li> <li>Stearns County Soil &amp; Water Conservation District</li> <li>Native American Tribes</li> </ul>

**TABLE 13.2**  
**AGENCIES AND ORGANIZATIONS RECEIVING COPIES OF THE DEIS**

<b>Federal Agencies</b> U.S. Army Corps of Engineers U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service U.S. Environmental Protection Agency U.S. Department of Agriculture-Natural Resource Conservation Service U.S. Department of the Interior
<b>State Agencies</b> Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Minnesota Department of Agriculture Minnesota Department of Commerce Minnesota Environmental Quality Board Minnesota Pollution Control Agency Minnesota State Historic Preservation Officer Minnesota Department of Health Board of Water and Soil Resources Minnesota State Patrol Division-Department of Public Safety
<b>Metropolitan Planning Organization</b> St. Cloud Area Planning Organization (APO)
<b>Counties</b> Wright Sherburne Stearns
<b>Cities</b> Becker Clear Lake Clearwater St. Augusta St. Cloud
<b>Townships</b> Haven Clear Lake Clearwater Becker
<b>Libraries</b> Legislative Reference Library Environmental Conservation Library Great River Regional Library St. Cloud Public Library Becker Branch of the Sherburne County Library Clearwater Branch of the Wright County Library

### **13.1.1 Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)**

The TAC was formed to serve as an advisor to Mn/DOT and to provide input on policy and technical issues. Their focus extends beyond transportation related issues to also include planning and environmental concerns. The TAC also assisted Mn/DOT in establishing criteria for evaluating the DEIS Alternatives. Table 13.1 shows a list of the agencies involved with the TAC. TAC members met at key points in the alternatives development, analysis and decision-making processes during preparation of the DEIS.

### **13.1.2 River Corridor Advisory Committee (RCAC)**

The RCAC was comprised of local elected officials. The purpose of this group was to act as a liaison to local governments and the public and to provide input on public policy and potential citizen concerns. Mn/DOT sent letters to local communities asking for each to designate a RCAC representative. Table 13.1 provides a list of RCAC members. This group met less frequently (approximately twice a year) to review analyses and provide input on issues analyzed in the DEIS.

### **13.1.3 Natural Resources Coordination**

In addition to the natural resource coordination/discussions that occurred during project TAC meetings, separate meetings were held with agency staff to discuss water and natural resource issues. In April 2002, Mn/DOT met with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS), the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MnDNR), the St. Cloud Area Planning Organization (APO) and the Stearns County Soil and Water Conservation District to get input from agency staff early in the EIS process regarding important water and/or natural resources located within the study area and to discuss any concerns/issues the agencies may have related to this project.

In January 2003, Mn/DOT met with MnDNR staff to review and discuss the four proposed Build Alternatives and potential impacts to resources under MnDNR jurisdiction. Mn/DOT and project team staff sought input from the MnDNR on several issues, including: fisheries, hydrology, wildlife and vegetation, endangered/threatened species, visual, recreation, user experience, etc. Mn/DOT was also looking for feedback as to whether or not the MnDNR saw problems with any of the four Build Alternatives, and whether or not any design revisions needed to be made at that stage.

### **13.1.4 Cultural Resources Coordination**

In October 2002, the Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and the Minnesota Department of Transportation – Cultural Resources Unit (Mn/DOT CRU) met with Mn/DOT staff to discuss cultural resource findings to date for the I-94/TH 10 Interregional Connection EIS study area, including a summary of studies completed and the results of those studies. The meeting also included a discussion of impacts/mitigation to eligible resources.

FHWA has consulted with Native American tribes and will continue to do so throughout the EIS process.

## **13.2 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

Public and agency involvement during the DEIS process was conducted in compliance with both federal (National Environmental Policy Act) and Minnesota environmental review and public involvement requirements. [The Scoping Document for this project describes public involvement during the pre-scoping and scoping processes.] The public involvement process endeavored to be inclusive of all residents in the project area and did not exclude anyone because of income, race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age or handicap.

### **13.2.1 Media Coverage**

Press releases for the open house meetings were provided to local media outlets and the Mn/DOT District 3 'News and Views' webpage ([ihub.dot.state.mn.us/d3/news.html](http://ihub.dot.state.mn.us/d3/news.html)) to inform the public about the March 2002 and March 2003 open house meetings. Various articles about the proposed project have been written by local newspapers throughout the DEIS preparation period.

### **13.2.2 Public Open House Notice**

Public open house meetings were held during the DEIS process to provide the public information and the opportunity to comment on the projects, alternatives and potential impacts.

The March 2002 public open house meeting notices were mailed as part of the March 2002 newsletter. The March 2002 newsletter was sent to property owners adjacent to the proposed study area and interested persons to inform them about the progress of the environmental review (preparation of the DEIS) and the March 2002 public open house meetings. The newsletter was sent to a mailing list of over 400 people that was developed by using county databases as well as property tax identification information. Notices for the March 2003 public open houses were mailed to approximately 500 persons prior to the meetings. The March 2003 mailing list included those persons who received the March 2002 newsletter or were added since the March 2002 open house. Persons on the mailing list included adjacent property owners, interested persons, regulatory agencies and local government officials.

Following is a brief summary of the public open house meetings held, including date, location number of attendees, purpose of meetings and comments received. A public open house package/record was completed for both the March 2002 and 2003 open houses, including the written comments received and a summary of written and verbal comments. This information is available at the Mn/DOT District 3 offices.

#### **March 2002 Open House Meetings**

Public open house meetings were held from 4:30 to 7:30 p.m. on March 13 and 14, 2002 at the Becker Community Center and the St. Cloud Holiday Inn Express, respectively. Approximately 120 people attended. The purpose of these two meetings was to present the four concept alternatives to be studied in the DEIS, as well as their associated transportation, environmental and social issues identified to date.

Public comments received during these two meetings were generally focused on issues/concerns such as the alignment of the alternatives; access; private property impacts; noise, Mississippi River; wetlands and other natural resource impacts; farmland impacts; impacts to the City of Clearwater and accommodation for pedestrians, bicyclists, snowmobilers and river users.

### **March 2003 Open House Meetings**

A second set of public open house meetings was held in March 2003 at the St. Marcus Church in Clear Lake from 4:30 to 7:30 p.m. and at the Becker City Hall from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. Approximately 200 people attended. No formal presentation was given, but layouts of the proposed project and other technical information were available. The layouts of the four Build Alternatives were updated with more detailed information to show highway design and location information, including construction limits and right of way boundaries. Also, additional information on the comparative social, economic and environmental (SEE) impacts and transportation and fiscal impacts was provided.

Public comments received at these two meetings were generally focused on issues/concerns such as preference or opposition to alternatives; access for private properties; access for emergency and roadway maintenance vehicles; social and economic impacts to the cities of Clear Lake and Clearwater; impacts to the Mississippi Scenic Riverway designation and river aquatic life; impacts to Clearview Elementary School along Alternatives B and C; impacts to agricultural activities; private property impacts including acquisition and/or property value impacts; and impacts to rural and natural environments.

### **13.2.3 DEIS Notice of Availability and Public Hearings**

A public hearing will be held on the DEIS at a minimum of 15 days after the notice of its availability is published in the Federal Register. The purpose of the public hearing will be to provide the public the opportunity to review the four Build Alternatives and the findings of the impact analysis completed as part of the DEIS process, and to comment on the DEIS.

The availability of the DEIS will be published in the Federal Register and the Minnesota EQB *Monitor*. Advertisements announcing the availability of the DEIS and the date of the public hearing will be published in various local and regional publications. Adjacent property owners and interested persons will also be mailed notices announcing availability of the DEIS. Copies of the DEIS will be available to the public for a minimum of 45 days following publication in the Federal Register.